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California Three Rs

Rights, Responsibility, and Respect

*A Project of the California County Superintendents Educational
Services Association and The First Amendment Center*

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Religion in the History-Social Science Textbook Adoption

Knowledge about religions is not only characteristic of an educated person, but it is also absolutely necessary for understanding and living in a world of diversity.

—National Council of the Social Studies

In the last fifteen years the statement above has become more and more the consensus among educators and other Americans. Learning about religion is now a solid part of the curriculum in California. However, it has proved to be more difficult than people realized to implement the study of religion in history-social science classrooms in public schools, as evidenced by the recent state textbook adoption process.

That religion matters to people is no surprise to textbook publishers, members of the Instructional Materials Advisory Panel, the Curriculum Commission, or the State Board of Education who have recently participated in California's most recent History-Social Science adoption. Based on Education Code 60044(a), the "Criteria for Evaluating Instructional Materials Kindergarten Through Grade Eight," created to guide publishers, includes a section related to religion in Criterion One on standards alignment, stating:

Materials on religious subject matter remain neutral; do not advocate one religion over another; do not include simulation or role playing of religious ceremonies or beliefs; do not include derogatory language about a religion or use examples from sacred texts or other religious literature that are derogatory, accusatory, or instill prejudice against other religions or those who believe in other religions. (p. 4)

As most California teachers know, there are many references to religion among the California History-Social Science Content Standards, particularly in grades 5, 6, 7, and 11. Textbook publishers worked very hard to follow those standards as they developed their materials, but when the public hearings in Sacramento took place on the K-8 adoption, there were many recommendations for changes from various religious groups. On some of the issues raised, religious groups and scholars disagreed both with one another and among themselves. The State Board carefully considered each recommendation and made decisions about what to include in the textbooks.

How does this controversy affect teachers and schools? The religious communities that testified in Sacramento are represented in schools throughout California. It is important that schools bring these parents and community members together to develop policies based on the idea that citizenship in the United States is not defined by religious affiliation. Americans take for granted our ability to live with deep

religious differences in public institutions such as schools. This ability rests on the promise of the First Amendment to provide a level playing field for people of all faiths or none. In the words of the Williamsburg Charter, a 1988 reaffirmation of the First Amendment:

“A right for a Protestant is a right for an Orthodox is a right for a Catholic is a right for a Jew is a right for a Humanist is a right for a Mormon is a right for a Muslim is a right for a Buddhist — and for the followers of any other faith within the wide bounds of the republic.”

What does this look like in the classroom? Teachers need to cover the standards on religion carefully and completely using scholarly sources, such as the adopted instructional materials, with the following in mind:

- Inclusion of study about religion is important in order for students to be properly educated about history and cultures.
- Religion must be taught objectively and neutrally.
- The purpose of public schools is to educate students about a variety of religious traditions, not to indoctrinate them into any tradition.

To do this well, teachers need a solid knowledge base about the religious beliefs of the cultures that are part of the content standards, and they need an understanding of how to teach about beliefs and values. This begins with a clear understanding of the crucial difference between the teaching *of* religion (religious education or indoctrination) and teaching *about* religion. “Religion in the Public School Curriculum” (<http://www.freedomforum.org/publications/first/findingcommonground/B07.inPublicSchool.pdf>), the guidelines issued by 17 religious and educational organizations, summarizes the distinction this way:

- The school’s approach to religion is *academic*, not *devotional*.
- The school strives for student *awareness* of religions, but does not press for student *acceptance* of any religion.
- The school sponsors *study* about religion, not the *practice* of religion.
- The school may *expose* students to a diversity of religious views, but may not *impose* any particular view.
- The school *educates* about all religions; it does not *promote* or *denigrate* religion.
- The school *informs* students about various beliefs; it does not seek to *conform* students to any particular belief.

Classroom discussions concerning religion must be conducted in an environment that is free of advocacy on the part of the teacher. Students may, of course, express their own religious views, as long as such expression is germane to the discussion. But public school teachers are required by the First Amendment to teach about religion fairly and objectively, neither promoting nor denigrating religion in general or specific religious groups in particular. When discussing religion, many teachers guard against injecting personal religious beliefs by teaching through attribution (e.g., by using such phrases as “most Buddhists believe . . .” or “according to the Hebrew scriptures. . .”). These criteria also apply to instructional materials provided to or used with students. If teachers are to meet these standards of performance, professional development is critical. A good first step will be for educators to attend the April 21st 3Rs Teaching world Religions Conference.

Parents, teachers and school leaders don’t have to agree with one another about religion. But if we’re going to uphold our commitment to the First Amendment, we must do everything to guard the rights of all in the public school setting — even those with whom we deeply disagree.

California Three Rs Steering Committee and Regional Leads Meeting
April 20, 2006 - 5:00 p.m. - 7:45 p.m.
Orange County Department of Education
Room B1107



California Three Rs Project
with generous support from Holt, Rinehart, and Winston
invites teachers, administrators, and curriculum specialists
to

Teaching About World Religions in Public Schools

DATE: April 21, 2006

LOCATION: Orange County
Department of Education – Building D

200 Kalmus Drive

Costa Mesa, CA 92628 (*handicapped accessible*)

TIME: 8:00 a.m.— 3:30 p.m.

COST: \$25 per person, includes lunch and materials

The California History-Social Science Content Standards include extensive coverage of world religions and the impact of religious ideas and practices on the story of human history. Teachers and administrators have requested academic background and teaching ideas on these topics. This conference will feature scholar sessions on the major world religions covered in the standards, paired with teacher discussions on how to apply this content in the classroom in a constitutionally permissible manner. Join us for this informative program. The tentative agenda appears below:

8:15– 9:30	3Rs Overview – Peg Hill	
9:45 – 11:10	Session I	
	Buddhism	Islam
	Scholar —James Santucci	Scholar – Bruce Grelle
	Teacher – Carissa Quan	Teacher –John Hergescheimer
11:15 – 12:10	Session II	
	Hinduism	Early Christianity
	Scholar – James Santucci	Scholar – Marvin Meyer
	Teacher – Connie De Capite	Teacher - Kim Plummer
1:35 – 3:00	Session III	
	Judaism	Protestant Reformation
	Scholar – Ben Hubbard	Scholar - Brad Starr
	Teacher – Debbie Granger	Teacher— Jennifer Norton
3:05 – 3:30	Closing Q & A – Applying 3Rs Principles in teaching world religions Distribute books and materials	

Online Registration: <http://oms.sbcss.k12.ca.us/index.php>

REGISTRATION DEADLINE – April 12, 2006 (no refunds after deadline)

Contact: Peg Hill (909) 386-2611

----- **World Religions Conference** -----

Name: _____ District: _____

School: _____ Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ Zip _____ Phone:() _____ Fax:() _____

Email (required) _____

Make check or P.O. payable to SBCSS. Mail completed registration coupon and \$25 per person to: San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools, Attention Margaret Hill, CA 3Rs Project Lead, 601 North E Street, San Bernardino, CA 92410-3093 Fax (909) 386=2667

California Three Rs Project Website:

http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/score_lessons/3rs/

Common Ground Resources:

Finding Common Ground: A Guide to Religious Liberty in Public Schools by Charles C. Haynes and Oliver Thomas. First Amendment Center, 2001.

This book has guidelines on how to handle a wide range of issues related to religious liberty and public schools.



First Amendment Center: Religious Liberty http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/rel_liberty/index.aspx

This is an up-to-the-minute resource with current issues and court cases. A PDF version of *Finding Common Ground* is available here.

For California Three Rs program information, contact...

Dr. Margaret Hill, California 3Rs Project Lead, San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools, 601 N. E St., San Bernardino, CA 92410, (909) 386-2611, peg_hill@sbcss.k12.ca.us

For First Amendment religious liberty information, contact...

Dr. Charles C. Haynes, First Amendment Center Senior Scholar, First Amendment Center/Arlington 1101 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA 22209 Tel: 703/528-0800 Fax: 703/284-3519
chaynes@freedomforum.org

For information on teaching about world religions, contact...

Dr. Bruce Grelle, Director, Religion and Public Education Resource Center, Department of Religious Studies, California State University Chico, Chico, CA 95929-0740, (530) 898-4739,
bgrelle@csuchico.edu

Sign up to receive the **Three Rs Bulletin** and program announcements electronically at peg_hill@sbcss.k12.ca.us